



ALL OUR KIN INC

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Education Committee Public Hearing

March 14, 2018

HB 5449 “An Act Concerning the Alignment and Merging of Early Care and Education Program Funding Streams, Eligibility, Rates and Policies.”

Natalie Vieira, Policy Fellow, All Our Kin

Senator Slossberg, Senator Boucher, Representative Fleischman, Representative Lavielle, and Members of the Education Committee, my name is Natalie Vieira, and I am the Policy Fellow at All Our Kin. All Our Kin is a nonprofit that trains and supports hundreds of home-based child care providers, giving them the tools and resources to provide high-quality early care and education and run sustainable child care businesses. These family child care providers transform opportunities for thousands of Connecticut’s youngest children and their families. I am here to testify on HB 5449: “An Act Concerning the Alignment and Merging of Early Care and Education Program Funding Streams, Eligibility, Rates and Policies.”

This bill adds explicit language to the mission of the Office of Early Childhood about the delivery of services to infants and toddlers, elevating the critical importance of access to early care and education during the earliest years. We applaud this statement that Connecticut is committed to ensuring that our infants and toddlers, and their families, have access to care from day one. The science is clear: according to Harvard’s Center on the Developing Child, babies’ brains form one million new neural connections per second during the first few years of life. The experiences that infants and toddlers have during this stage of rapid brain development can literally shape their ability to succeed in school and beyond. HB 5449 reflects years of research and advocacy, putting infants and toddlers at the forefront of the conversation around delivery of services in early childhood.

In addition, HB 5449 opens the door for prioritization of infants and toddlers during times when there is a waitlist for the Care4Kids child care subsidy program. With few, limited exceptions, Care4Kids is the only funding available to support infant and toddler care. This is despite what we know about brain development, and despite the fact that infant and toddler care is much more expensive than care for 3 – 5 year olds. As such, when Care4Kids funding is at risk, our infants and toddlers are disproportionately impacted. During the fifteen months when the Care4Kids program was closed to new applicants, infant and toddler enrollment dropped from 8,172 children to just 4,400 children, a more than 46% decrease in infant and toddler enrollment. That is why the prioritization of infants and toddlers outlined in HB 5449 is so important and so needed: it puts our youngest children front and center, ensuring that their families have the ability to place them in safe, nurturing programs and that Connecticut is investing in our children during the time when it matters most.

HB 5449 presents an exciting opportunity for Connecticut to align its early childhood priorities with research on the importance of investing in infants and toddlers. We thank the Office of Early Childhood, and the legislature, for your continued efforts to ensure that high-quality, affordable early care and education is accessible to all Connecticut families.